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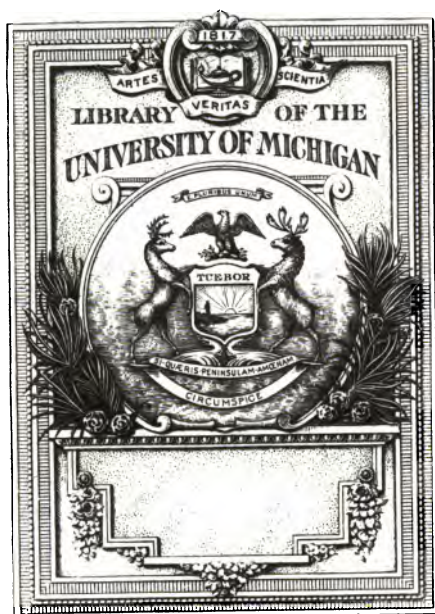
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*Form Dr. S. A. Green
Dec 26 95*

THE JOURNEYMAN'S RETROSPECT.

S P E E C H

OF

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS

At the Harvard Alumni Dinner,

COMMENCEMENT DAY,

JUNE 26, 1895.



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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE ALUMNI:

SOME years ago a distinguished literary character, as well as accomplished and lovable man,—since gone over to the silent majority,—stood here, as I now am standing, having a few hours before received Harvard's highest degree. Not himself a child of the University, he had been invited here a stranger,—though in Cambridge he was by no means a stranger in a strange land,—to receive well-deserved recognition for the good life-work he had done, and the high standard of character he had ever maintained. When called upon by the presiding officer of that occasion, as I now am called upon by you, he responded by saying that the day before he had left his New York home to come to Cambridge a simple, ordinary man; he would go back, “ennobled.”

In America, patents of nobility may not be conferred,—the fundamental law itself inhibits; so, when from the mother country the name of Sir Henry Irving comes sounding across the Atlantic, we cannot answer in reply with a Sir Joseph Jefferson, but we do not less, perhaps,

in honor of great Shakespeare's craft, by inviting him to whom you have this day given the greatest ovation on any bestowed, to come up and join the family circle which surrounds America's oldest Alma Mater. Still, figurative though it was, for George William Curtis to refer to Harvard's honorary degree as an ennoblement was a graceful form of speech; but I, to the manner born, stand here under similar circumstances in a different spirit. Memory insensibly reverts to other days,—other scenes.

Forty-two years ago President Eliot and I passed each other on the steps of University Hall,—he coming down them with his freshly signed bachelor's degree in his hand, while I ascended them an anxious candidate for admission to the College. His apprenticeship was over; mine was about to begin. For twenty-six eventful years now he has presided over the destinies of the University, and at last we meet here again; I to receive from his hands the diploma which signifies that the days of my travels,—my *Wanderjahre*,—as well as my apprenticeship, are over, and that the journeyman is at length admitted to the circle of Master-workmen.

So, while Mr. Curtis declared that he went away from here with a sense of ennoblement, my inclination is to sit down, not metaphorically but in fact, on yonder steps of University Hall, and think for a little—somewhat wearily, perhaps—over the things I have seen and the lessons I have learned since I first ascended those steps when the last half of the century now ending had only just begun,—an interval longer than that during which the children of Israel were condemned to tarry in the wilderness!

And, were I so to do, I am fain to confess two feelings would predominate: wonder and admiration,—wonder over the age in which I have lived, mingled with admiration for the results which in it have been accomplished and the heroism displayed. And yet this was not altogether what the prophet voices of my apprenticeship had, I remember, led me to expect; for in those days, and to a greater degree than seems to be the case at present, we had here at Cambridge prophet voices which in living words continually exhorted us. Such were Tennyson, Thackeray, Emerson, and, perhaps, most of all Carlyle,—Thomas Carlyle with his *Heroes and Hero Worship*, his *Latter Day Pamphlets*, his worship of the Past and his scorn for the Present, his contempt for what he taught us to term this “rag-gathering age.” We sat at the feet of the great literary artist, our ’prentice ears drank in his utterances; to us he was inspired.

The literary artist remains. As such we bow down before him now even more than we bowed down before him then; but how different have we found the age in which our lot was cast from that he had taught us to expect! I have been but a journeyman. Only to a small, a very small extent, I know, can I, like the Ulysses of that other of our prophet voices, declare

“I am a part of all that I have met.”

None the less,

“Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.”

We were told in those, our ’prentice days, of the heroism of the past and the materialism of our present, when

"who but a fool would have faith in a tradesman's wares or his word," and "only not all men lied;" and yet, when, in 1853, you, Mr. President, the young journeyman, descended, as I, the coming apprentice, ascended those steps, "the cobweb woven across the cannon's mouth" still shook "its threaded tears in the wind." Eight years later the cobweb was swept away; and though, as the names graven on the tablets at the entrance of this hall bear witness, "many were crushed in the clash of jarring claims," yet we too felt the heart of a people beat with one desire, and witnessed the sudden making of splendid names. I detract nothing from the halo of knighthood which surrounds the heads of Sidney and of Bayard; but I was the contemporary and friend of Savage, of Lowell and of Shaw. I had read of battles and "the imminent deadly breach;" but it was given me to stand on the field of Gettysburg when the solid earth trembled under the assault of that Confederate Virginian column, then performing a feat of arms than which I verily believe none in all recorded warfare was ever more persistent, more deadly or more heroic.

And our prophet spoke to us of the beauty of silent work, and he held up before us the sturdy patience of the past in sharp contrast with the garrulous self-evidence of that deteriorated present, of which we were to be a part; and yet, scarcely did we stand on the threshold of our time, when a modest English naturalist and observer broke years of silence by quietly uttering the word which relegated to the domain of fable that which, since the days of Moses, had been accepted as the foundation of religious belief. In the time of our apprenticeship we still read of the mystery of Africa in the pages of Hero-

dotus, while the sources of the Nile were as unknown to our world as to the world of the Pharaohs ; then one day a patient, long-suffering, solitary explorer emerged from the wilderness, and the secret was revealed. In our own time and before our purblind eyes, scarcely realizing what they saw or knowing enough to wonder, Livingstone eclipsed Columbus, and Darwin rewrote Genesis.

The Paladin we had been told was a thing of the past ; ours was the era of the commonplace ; and, lo ! Garibaldi burst like a rocket above the horizon, and the legends of Colchis and the crusader were eclipsed by the newspaper record of current events.

The eloquent voice from Cheyne Row still echoed in our ears, lamenting the degeneracy of a time given over to idle talk and the worship of mammon,—defiled by charlatans and devoid of workers ; and in answer, as it were, Cavour and Lincoln and Bismarck crossed the world's stage before us, and joined the immortals.

We saw a dreaming adventurer, in the name of a legend, possess himself of France and of imperial power. A structure of tinsel was reared, and glittered in the midst of an age of actualities. Then all at once came the nineteenth-century Nemesis, and, eclipsing the avenging deity of which we had read in our classics, drowned in blood and obliterated with iron the shams and the charlatans who, our teacher had told us, were the essence and characteristic of the age.

And the College,—the Alma Mater!—she who to-day has placed me above the rank of journeyman,—what changes has she witnessed during those years of probation?—rather what changes has she not witnessed ! Of those — President, professors, instructors and officers —



connected with it then, two only remain ; but the young bachelor of arts who, degree in hand, came down the steps that I was then ascending, has for more than half those years presided over the destinies of the University, and, under the impulse of his strong will and receptive mind, we have seen the simple, traditional College of the first half of the century develop into the differentiated University of the latter half. In 1856, when I received from the University my first diploma, the college numbered in the aggregate of all its classes fewer students than are found in the average single class of to-day. And in the mean while what have her alumni done for the Alma Mater? In 1853, when my apprenticeship began, the accumulated endowment of the more than two centuries which preceded amounted to less than one million of dollars ; the gifts and bequests of the forty-two years covered by my apprenticeship and travels have added to the one million over ten millions ! And this, we were taught, was the "rag-gathering age" of a "trivial, jeering, withered, unbelieving" generation ! — at least, it gave !

Thus, as I stand here to-day in the high places of the University and try to speak of the lessons and the theories of life which my travels have taught me, — as I pause for a brief space by the well-remembered college steps which more than forty classes have since gone up and descended, and, while doing so, look back over the long vista of probation, my impulse is to bear witness to the greatness and splendor, not to the decadence and meanness, of the age of which I have been a part. My eyes too have seen great men accomplishing great results, — I have lived and done journeyman work in a time than